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Alvin S. Felzenberg, *A Man and His Presidents: The Political Odyssey of William F. Buckley Jr.*

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4. In Alvin Felzenberg’s book, *A Man and His Presidents: The Political Odyssey of William F. Buckley Jr.*, the author covers the political life of Buckley by focusing on his career as a political strategist and a major center-right political actor of his era. The book fills a gap in the literature on the development of conservative ideology in the United States by focusing on the political relationships and the political debates between Buckley and conservative as well as liberal operatives. The modern day conservative movement created by Buckley faced opposition from New Deal conservatives (i.e. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John Dewey), far right conservatives (i.e. John Birch Society and Barry Goldwater), moderate liberals (i.e. Arthur M. Schlesinger and John F. Kennedy), the civil right movement, and etc. While competing for political space with the aforementioned, Buckley’s views of limited central government, tax reform and isolationist foreign policy influenced the highest level of government during the Reagan era.
5. The Trump administration challenges the traditional conservative agenda created by William F. Buckley Jr, Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan. Considering the current state of affairs in the U.S., *A Man and His Presidents: The Political Odyssey of William F. Buckley Jr.* discusses the importance to review the evolution of the conservative movement in the backdrop of a “Big Tent” party that has been coopted by a populist message. This current political climate is a battle of ideas between Jack Kemp Republicans (which originated on the Buckley/Goldwater side of the Republican party) and the Stephen Bannon ideologues.
in the administration. In his book, the development of Buckley’s political cultivation of Republican conservatives demonstrates the fragmentation and pluralistic nature that has challenged the creation of a comprehensive political party message. Furthermore, Alvin Felzenberg describes the political constraints of Buckley in the development of the conservative party, at the same time, demonstrating the impact that he had in the foundation of conservative thought.

To establish the conservative evolution of Buckley, the author describes the ideological battles between Buckley and former presidents and leading political figures. Presidents Richard Nixon, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush defined their own brands of conservatism and their implementation in the Republican Party which went against Buckley’s domestic and foreign policy agenda. For example, even though Buckley initially supported the U.S. mission in Iraq, his opinion changed after the failure of George W. Bush’s policy of troop deployment and his inability to create a foreign policy that countered the Wilson era self-determination agenda. Furthermore, this event challenged Buckley’s idea that policy should be set by elites in a Burkean manner to help the nation state guide itself away from populist tendencies. During the George W. Bush administration, Buckley continued to promote the idea of American Universalism and criticized the state-building agenda implemented in Iraq and Afghanistan. Buckley continued to criticize the Obama presidency for supporting the policy of the previous administration regarding troop deployment and appropriations for defense spending by the military.

With the creation of the National Review, Buckley provided a medium that stimulated the engagement of the conservative movement by focusing on economic conservatives, libertarians, traditionalists, religious right advocates and neoconservatives. While Buckley was at the center of the conservative movement, his fellow colleagues at the National Review and across the political spectrum impacted his intellectual evolution. For example, Arthur M. Schlesinger, the left-leaning public intellectual, commented that, later in life, Buckley stopped defending one of his early heroes, Senator Joseph McCarthy, while taking pride in modernizing the conservative party by challenging racists and anti-Semites in the party leadership. At the same time, throughout his political career, the Democratic party and left-leaning intellectuals accused him of racism because of his positions on political exclusion of minorities and the federal government’s intervention in the civil rights movements. Despite criticism from the left, Buckley forged an intellectual friendship with Henry Kissinger with whom he was able to strengthen his isolationist foreign policy agenda and his “hawkish” view toward communism. Also, their intellectual disagreements never caused them to challenge their realist understanding of international politics. In Reagan, Buckley found a politically like-minded colleague who helped him push his domestic conservative ideology into the policy debate. Even though Reagan did not fully implement Buckley’s domestic agenda and Buckley disagreed with Reagan publicly on cutting taxes for the wealthy, he still defended the Reagan administration from the left over ideological differences from the left.

A Man and His Presidents: The Political Odyssey of William F. Buckley Jr. illustrates a comprehensive historical account of the development of a modern day conservative movement through describing the political life and the relationships of Buckley which developed a thriving right-leaning ideological platform. In relation to Buckley’s impact on the conservative movement, this review fills a gap in the literature that will allow us to further analyze the ideological development of the modern day conservative
movement. The author describes the ideological foundation of the conservative platform as a fragmented political party that challenges the status quo of the far right and left to create an agenda for the ideological center.

In drawing the readers' attention to the importance of Buckley's creation of a modern day conservative movement, the author provides a general overview of the political relationships between Buckley and his political adversaries and ideological evolution of the conservative party. By discussing the impact of the National Review on the development of conservatism, the book illustrates the political debate of the conservative movement and multiple ways of self definition by the right. Social scientists interested in the development of conservatism in the United States and the life of William F. Buckley Jr. will benefit from reading A Man and His Presidents: The Political Odyssey of William F. Buckley Jr. by Alvin Felzenberg.